

New Citizens Advisory Board starts

Metra has launched a re-constituted Citizens Advisory Board, a group of Metra riders and area residents whose job will be to provide input to Metra on the commuter railroad's policies, programs and services.

The Metra Board of Directors took steps to reestablish the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) at its December meeting. Each of the 11 board members was asked to appoint a new member to serve on the citizens panel, and the new CAB held its first meeting last month. The original CAB was in place for many years but had become inactive as membership declined.

Metra has long recognized that in order to provide quality service and programs for its passengers, voices along all of its lines need to be heard.

"As part of our review of how Metra is working and should work, the Board of Directors has determined to actively move to engage the public and our riders," said Director Jim LaBelle, who is serving as the board's liaison to the CAB. "I see this as a valuable way to make Metra work better – and not just to make Metra work better but to make the regional transportation system as a whole work better."

The function of the CAB is to meet with the Metra Board of Directors periodically and provide counsel on how Metra policies, programs and services affect the area constituents for each representative. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)



Citizens Advisory Board member C. Robert Wahlen (left), alternate member Forester Du Sell, and members Jeffrey A. Berman and Jamy L. Lyne attended the meeting of the new CAB in January.

Act establishes a formal board comprised of area residents, and the CAB process is designed to ensure that the ethnic, cultural and geographic diversity of residents in the six counties served by Metra is represented.

CAB members are appointed to two-year terms and will serve without compensation.

At its first meeting in January, the board received a presentation by Metra staff that familiarized them with Metra's system, its operating and capital budgets, its ridership and on-time performance and some recent policies and challenges. For instance, Acting Executive Director Bill Tupper described the new Quiet Car policy, which is now being tested on the Rock Island line and is expected to be expanded to other lines after

the test is complete at the end of March.

Members also discussed topics for future meetings, which included reviewing how Metra communicates service issues to its riders and an update on Metra's New Starts expansion projects.

"I think this is a good start," said new CAB member Ernest Sawyer.

The next CAB meeting was set for 9 a.m. on March 18 at Metra headquarters, 547 W. Jackson.

Members so far include Gary McClung, appointed by Director Arlene J. Mulder (suburban Cook County); Patricia Mahon, appointed by Director Edward W. Paesel (suburban Cook County); Jamy L. Lyne, appointed by Director Jack E. Partelow (Will County); Sue Klinkhamer, ap-

pointed by Director Caryl J. Van Overmeiren (Kane County); Jeffrey A. Berman, appointed by Director Jim LaBelle (Lake County); Ernest Sawyer, appointed by Director Larry A. Huggins (Chicago); Timothy Calcagno, appointed by Director James V. Dodge (suburban Cook County); and Robert J. Nunamaker, appointed by Director Jack Schaffer (McHenry County).

In addition to the appointees from Metra's Board of Directors, two original CAB members will serve a new term. They are C. Robert Wahlen, appointed by the South Suburban Mass Transit District, and Pamela Pelizzari, appointed by the West Suburban Mass Transit District.

More information about CAB and its members can be found at www.metrarail.com.



On the Bi-Level

Published by Metra's Media Relations Department. Send letters, questions or feedback to On the Bi-Level, Metra, 547 W. Jackson, Chicago IL, 60661-5717. Or e-mail onthebilevel@metrarr.com.

We can't guarantee all letters will be printed or answered. Please keep letters to less than 200 words and include your first name, hometown and what line you ride. (Names are not required but strongly encouraged.) We reserve the right to edit letter for length and grammar.

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SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

Quiet Cars debut

We haven't even completed a full week of the Quiet Cars and someone is already in violation. On my train out of Joliet a woman sat in the Quiet Car talking and filing her fingernails. Do you know how annoying that is when you are sitting somewhere that you can hear a pin drop and someone decides to give herself a manicure? With a conductor not inside to monitor and advise this individual of her wrongdoings we had to suffer all the way to Chicago. If she is reading this right now she should find a social car to sit in or take an earlier train.

Please be considerate and respect the Quiet Cars.

A rider

Thanks for the feedback. We'll confess to not anticipating that loud manicures might be an issue. She must have really been filing away. But you don't have to suffer. Speak up. Politely advise her that she's in a Quiet Car. It's early on in the program; she may not have even realized what she was doing. And we want to encourage other Rock Island riders to write to us to let us know how they think the Quiet Car test is going. We welcome all comments and suggestions. Send your e-mail to onthebilevel@metrarr.com.

Quiet cars unfair

This is the first time I have ever written to Metra but I think it's absurd to try to enforce something like this. I have been riding the Metra for 15-plus years and I pay \$152 a month. Who are you to tell me I can't talk on my cell phone while using public transportation? Also, if you have done a little research, you will see that the middle cars of the train are always quiet! This is totally unfair.

Another rider

When we asked for input on this issue, there were some riders who agreed with you. But there were far, far more riders (many of whom also pay \$152 or more a month) who told us it's totally unfair for them to have to listen to someone else's cell phone call. There are clearly sharp differences of opinion on this. We are trying our best to take an approach that satisfies all.

It gets the grease

Could someone please fix the squeaky door at the Richton Park train station? It's the second set of entrance doors.

Rhonda

Commandos armed with oil cans have already invaded the station and subdued the squeak.

35th St. update

Any news yet as to when the 35th St. station (near Illinois Institute of Technology) will be open?

Babs

The station will be open this spring.

Heaven and Rochelle

It was an interesting article on the new plant in Rochelle which will produce railcars for Metra and possibly other railroads. But how come you did not mention Rochelle's importance as a railfan center? While there are no trains there that you can actually ride, there are two busy mainlines and a rail park, perhaps the only one not on a major yard. The railcar plant, while it may not offer many tours, will certainly add to the attraction.

Peter

It's because while we here in the Media Relations Department are fans of rail, we are not

diehard railfans (we didn't say 'foamers'!), and didn't know of Rochelle's reputation. Now we do. Thanks.

Pedal politics

This past Sunday some individuals who were angry at me for bringing my bike along said some very hurtful things to me. I have commuted on several days during Bears games and several days that were very busy, but all during the specified times allowing bicycles. There were two suitcases and a stroller parked along with my bike, but only I received comments and apparently the conductors did as well. Plus my bike took up three seats and there were at least a dozen people without seats, so even IF my bike hadn't been there only three of those people would have had seats that they would have needed to give up anyway if someone less capable had required it. Could you please put something in your newsletter that lets people know that we cyclists are trying to be respectful and that if we're following those guidelines set forth for us we are within our rights to commute just like all the rest of you?

Tifanie

Done. Non-cyclists: please remember to treat pedaling passengers politely. Cyclists: thanks for following the rules. And please remember that conductors have the discretion to bar your bike from a crowded train even if you are trying to board within the designated hours.

Get a clue

For the handful of you who did the crossword last month and noticed we forgot the clue for 33 Down, sorry about that. We cede the high ground to you for our mistake and hope it didn't cause too much aggravation.

SOUND OFF

“...the snarky, snotty observations by Metra’s customers about fellow commuters ... offer some of the best free entertainment around.” - SouthtownStar, March 13, 2009

Seat-hogging response

In December we featured letters from Jake and Tim, two riders who defended their practice of hogging more than one seat. Below are more of the letters we received responding to them:

To Jake the Seat-Hogger:
Wow, you must be the only Metra rider who wakes up early to ride the train to work. Get a grip, there are plenty of us who get up and ride an early morning train to get to work. I ride to Ogilvie on the 6:41 from Evanston to catch the 7:45 to Downers Grove. I take one seat, leave my shoes on, shower before I leave home, walk a mile to the train, have my mobile device on silent, speak in hushed tones on the phone, and enjoy not driving to work.

Hey Jake, sleep at home!!

A rider

When I see a seat-hogger, I purposely sit next to them – asleep or not. Too bad that some people behave or act in a way that is offensive to you. Your admission is offensive to me.

I will wake you up – nicely at first. If you ignore me, I will wake you up in a more persistent way until you move your stuff off my half of the seat. I search out seat-hoggers like you just to teach you a lesson.

Anonymous

Quick observation re the two writers who OTBL appropriately labelled as the “proudly selfish seat-hogging braggarts defending themselves” – no matter how different (and weak) their reasons for hogging the seats may be, they both seemed to be have a common theme related to farts/farting. Going forward, I’m going to avoid all seat-hoggers –

lest
I run
into
one of
these two
“seat-farters”
or others of
their ilk.

Fez

I agree with Jake and Tim to an extent. Me personally, if I see there are other seats available I do hog seats. If you want me to move my items so you can sit by me then I think we are all adults enough (including the students) to simply ask me to move my items rather than give me some crazy look or mumble some comment while walking by. I do not respond to crazy looks or some other type of sarcastic body language.

Now, when I notice there are people standing and no seats, I do remove my items. Let’s not complicate this folks!

Rick

I found a way to keep from being annoyed by the seat-hoggers – I regard them as seat-savers! I don’t care how packed the train is, there is always that one person who is saving me a seat. I just say, “Excuse me” and I have a nice ride all the way downtown.

Arlene

Arlene, we like your attitude. That’s what we’ve always advocated – just politely ask the seat-hoggers if you can sit. Hopefully the seat-hoggers will react more like Rick, and less like Jake and Tim. There’s always the risk of a malodorous reception, but we think the risk is minimal.



Shelf-hoggers, Part 1

I see a lot here about people who hog seat space, but what about the shelf-hogs? I’m sure you’ve seen this guy. ...He feels it’s OK to take his long dress coat and stretch it out on the upper shelf nice and flat, thus taking up the space for the three or more seats around him. What makes him so special? I have no problem folding my coat and putting it on the rack, why not him? And for that matter, why don’t people use the rack instead of the shelf? Isn’t that what it’s for?

As far as lost tickets go, I have left mine in the ticket clip twice! Neither time was it brought to the lost and found. Shameless.

Scott

To answer your questions: We’ve seen those guys. Nothing. Don’t know. Don’t know. Yes. And sorry about your tickets. But many tickets are turned in to us, which is why it’s important to write your name and contact info on them.

Flying body parts

To the man who thinks his commute to the city in the morning on the MDN is the best time to clip his nails: PLEASE STOP! Not only does the sound of that clipper grate on my ears in an otherwise silent train car at 6:45 a.m., but it’s disgusting to think of your nail clippings all over the seat and floor. This is something that you do at home, in your bathroom, holding your hand over the wastebasket or toilet. And how quickly do your nails grow? You do this every week or two and it TAKES YOU FOREVER TO FINISH. The train is not the place for your personal hygiene!

Anna

Another loud manicure?! We’d like to scold this guy, but we’re a little frightened of those fast-growing nails.

Hold your liquor

To the gentleman on the 5:22 headed to Naperville whose beer took a spill over the upper level railing onto my head: don’t drink and ride if you can’t hold your alcohol.

Smells like beer now

Winter Travel Notes

Take Metra and CTA to United Center

If you're planning on checking out the action at the United Center, count on Metra and the CTA to get you there to enjoy every minute of the game. Ride Metra into the city, then hop on the CTA's #19 United Center Express Bus from Ogilvie Transportation Center, Union, or Millennium Stations. Buses operate every 10 minutes, starting 90 minutes before events. For additional information, call the RTA Travel Information Center at 836-7000 from any local area code.

Metra Safety Contest deadline nears

Parents, please encourage your children to spread the word about rail safety by participating in Metra's annual safety poster and essay contests. The deadline is March 15, so don't let them miss out on the chance to win prizes and have their work displayed throughout North-eastern Illinois. Students in grades K-12 are invited to submit either a poster or an essay illustrating this year's theme: "Safety First: Look, Listen, Live." The winning entries become part of Metra's annual safety promotion in communities and schools throughout the region. Winning artwork will be featured on Metra's safety posters and the

2012 monthly tickets. Enter one contest or both – just be sure to have your entries in by the contest deadline of March 15. Remember, the top prize for each grade or division is a laptop computer! For contest rules and guidelines or to submit your entry online, visit our website at www.metracontest.com.

Use Metra Family Cars

Metra's Family Car program is available on all trains that arrive or depart their downtown terminals between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., and between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m., Monday through Friday. On weekends and holidays, Family Cars are available between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. Please check with a member of the train crew before boarding for the location of the Family Car. In most cases, however, the lift-equipped train car, identified with the "access" symbol, will be the designated family car. For Metra Electric trains, the rear working car of the train will be the designated car. While families are not required to use this car, nor are other passengers restricted from using it, the Family Car program provides train personnel the opportunity to offer assistance to ensure a pleasant trip.

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